

He Helped Carry Lincoln Out of Ford's Theatre

By Katherine Pope

Who is the author of several sketches concerning Lincoln

FREDERICK JOHNSTONE, until recently chief clerk in the Quartermaster's Depot in Chicago, and still hale and hearty and going strong after fifty-seven years' continuous government service, was one of the men who helped carry the wounded Lincoln out of Ford's Theatre the night of April 14, 1865. His memory of that occasion is still fresh and distinct, and he talked about it for readers of *FARM AND FIRESIDE*, for this, the fifty-seventh anniversary month of Lincoln's assassination.

Johnstone knew John Wilkes Booth, the man who shot Lincoln, by sight, and remembers him as a handsome man. On the afternoon of April 14, 1865, he saw him coming out of a saloon. In the light of what happened later his thoughts went back to that incident, and he recalled it was said that Booth was a drinking man.

AT THIS time Johnstone lived just below and across from Ford's Theatre, on Tenth Street, between E and F. Quoting Johnstone:

"April 14, 1865, fell on Good Friday. A party of us, all young men, were assembled that evening in a friend's room playing cards. The place was diagonally across from Ford's, and from a window of the room the entrance to Ford's was plainly visible. The evening was warm, so I left the game and went over to the window. Looking down on the theatre I saw people pouring out excitedly. I noticed acquaintances, saw Colonel Du Barry and wife coming out, the woman leaning on her husband. I knew something was wrong, and crossed over the street.

It was muddy, not well paved. I met Dr. Foster (or Forester), and he said: "My God, Johnstone, they've shot Lincoln!"

I ENTERED the theatre, saw actors on the stage, noticed officers trying to get up to Lincoln's box (which had been locked by Booth), and that an army officer was trying to climb up. The door was finally forced. The stairway was narrow, and only a few could help carry Lincoln down. My room-mate (a young fellow named Daggett) and I stood by the foot of the stairway waiting to see if we could help. When Lincoln was brought down, Daggett said, "Stick in, Johnstone!" and we both helped to carry Lincoln out of the

theatre. I took his head, and observed that his eyes were closed. We carried him across the street to the door of Peterson's house.

"We stayed outside, near by. Some members of the Cabinet came, also the surgeon general of the army, General Barnes.

"Someone in the crowd said that Seward also was assassinated. Daggett was secretary in Seward's department, so we left and hurried over to Seward's house in Lafayette Square. He lived in a house that had a history—a man had been shot there before. We met the Secretary of War coming out. Daggett said to him, 'Mr. Secretary, is Mr. Seward badly injured?' The reply was, 'Well, yes.'

"We returned to Tenth Street. The place was surrounded by soldiers; F Street on one side, E Street on the other. I said to one of the guards, who refused to let us through, 'But, Officer, we live here!' We were denied admission. Then we appealed to a superior officer, and he gave us an escort guard to see if we had actual residence there. We got admission to our rooms, but later returned to observe Peterson's house.

"Plain-clothes men were outside. Lincoln was not yet dead. We stayed around until three o'clock, and at that time did not yet know who the murderer was. We went home and slept a little, and found at seven that Lincoln was still alive. He

died shortly afterward. His body was then removed to the White House.

"Business for a time was at a standstill. In the departments practically nothing was being done. Mourning was general. Lincoln dead, even his enemies spoke well of him. On all sides you heard nothing but good spoken. The papers that had made fun of his appearance and manner now had only praise for him.

"In line with the last statement it seems well to reprint two of the stanzas from "Punch":

"You lay a wreath on murdered Lincoln's bier!
You, who with mocking pencil wont to trace,
Brave for the self-complacent British sneer,
His length of shambling limb, his furrowed face!

"Yes, he has lived to shame me
from my sneer—
To lame my pencil and confute
my pen—

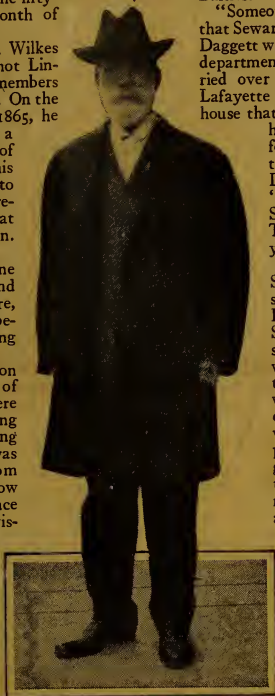
To make me own this kind of
princes peer,
This rail-splitter, a true-born king of men!"

During the eventful years 1863-73 Johnstone served his department in Washington, residing at the Capital during that period. He was in his early twenties when he went to live in Washington, working as a clerk in the commissary general's office. During those days of stress the clerks in the War Department Rifles; were drilled wore a uniform, had an armory—near the White House, toward the river,—held themselves in readiness if needed for defense.

THE city was then encircled by forts. General Early was approaching with his Confederate troops, a fact known to Grant. The latter sent an army corps to defend the city, and shots were exchanged. Later the regiment of quartermaster's men was sent out, and again shots were exchanged. Within the city there were frequent rumors of serious trouble, and the War Department Rifles were kept in readiness for emergencies. Johnstone recalls that the evening following Lincoln's second inauguration there was whispering of an uprising by Confederate prisoners and Confederate sympathizers, wherefore the Rifles were put on guard all night at the armory. It proved a false alarm, and the men were able to return to their usual tasks the next morning.

On his way to the Treasury, Johnstone often met President Lincoln on his way to the War Department. In passing, they would exchange greetings; that is, the young man would pay his respects to the President, and the latter acknowledge the courtesy. On the occasions of the President's levees Mr. Johnstone shook hands with Lincoln. Very frequently during those days he saw Lincoln on the street, and cherishes the well-remembered picture of that tall, gaunt figure with the care-worn face.

IT WAS a common thing for Lincoln to go the War Department to get the latest news in person. Johnstone recalls that whenever there was anything special, any exciting victory, the people would surge toward the White House, for they wanted to hear the word confirmed by the President. Soon after the news arrived of the surrender of Lee, early in the forenoon the people surged about the White House and waited until Lincoln should appear and speak to them. Johnstone saw Lincoln on this occasion, and heard him address the crowd from the porch of the White House. He remembers how jubilant the crowd was, how happy Lincoln seemed. But Lincoln's joy was not that of one carried away by exultation. In that hour of victory the few words uttered to the waiting throng were those wherein hate was absent, wherein an expression was made of the hope for a (Continued on page 27)



This is Frederick Johnstone, retired chief clerk in the Chicago Quartermaster's Depot, who tells of our great War President as he remembers him

At \$1 an Hour

A FOREMAN of a railroad gang discovered one of his workmen peacefully sleeping in the shade of a tree. Without disturbing the man, the foreman said:

"Shlake on, shlake on, ye spalpeen, for as long as ye shlake ye have a job, but as soon as ye wake, ye're fired!"—*Forbes*.

He Helped Carry Lincoln

(Continued from page 10)

united people. And the speaker swayed the crowd, held and guided them.

At that tense moment young Frederick Johnstone heard Lincoln say to the excited listeners:

"We have captured the South, also the song of the South. And now, here in Washington, I can ask the band if they will play Dixie!"

In that city, where the majority of the natives sympathized with the South and called the Northerners by the hated name of "Yanks"—though the city was the capital of the "Yanks,"—must not both sides have felt the greatness of the leader who in the first flush of victory instinctively labored for reunion? And what an occasion, in the capital of the North, when men's minds were still inflamed by all those years of bitter partisanship, that the "song of the South" should be played at the command of Lincoln!

Young Johnstone was so fortunate as to hear also that wonderful second inaugural address. He could not get very close to the speaker—had to take a seat on a lumber pile back some distance, but was able to catch the immortal phrases: "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations."

JOHNSTONE also heard Douglas Wal-lach, mayor of Washington, address the people after Lee's surrender. The mayor spoke of his joy that the war now was ended, and was so unfortunate as to use the phrase, "I am too full for utterance." Whereupon someone in the crowd called out: "What you been drinkin', Doug?"

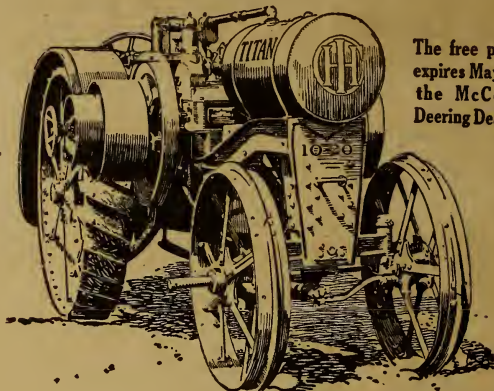
Walt Whitman, Mr. Johnstone recalls as a conspicuous figure even on the streets of Washington, where conspicuous figures were, so to speak, a commonplace. Down Pennsylvania Avenue they all passed, but when Walt Whitman trod that way the passer-by was wont to turn for a second glance. Mr. Johnstone pictures him as a frosty-bearded, big fellow, dressed for comfort, wearing a soft collar and with his chest exposed. Pennsylvania Avenue evidently was to him not so much a city street as an "open road," where he could walk with freedom and dress with freedom.

Next month Jonathan Brooks relates one of his interesting horse stories entitled, "Red Blood and Blue Ribbons." No one writing inside stories about horses is more conversant with the facts than Jonathan Brooks. You will not want to miss this human story.

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